

**Aqueous Solution for Electrodepositing  
Tin-Zinc Alloys**

**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION**

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The present application is a continuation of serial number PCT/EP99/08724 filed November 12, 1999.

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The present invention relates to an aqueous solution for the deposition of tin-zinc alloys, especially an electroplating bath permitting the deposition of tin-zinc alloys from a cyanide-free tin(II)-zinc(II) solution with simple bath management.

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Products coated with a tin-zinc alloy by electroplating are characterised by excellent corrosion resistance. Especially the resistance against hydraulic fluid and aqueous salt solutions make products coated in this manner interesting for the automobile industry. Owing to their corrosion resistance and the excellent solderability, products coated with a tin-zinc alloy are also used in the wireless, electro and construction industry.

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Electroplating baths common in the past contained tin in the oxidation stage +IV and cyanide ions. However, such electroplating baths have the disadvantage that a higher energy input than for tin(II) ions is necessary for depositing tin(IV) ions. In addition, bath management is faced with the complication that, upon dissolution of the anode, which advantageously also consists of a tin-zinc alloy, the formation of tin(IV) ions must be assisted by formation of a film by means of polarisation. In addition, the thickness and composition of the deposited tin-zinc alloy depends on the current density and thus the geometry of the substrate. In addition, the toxicity of the cyanide ions makes industrial utilisation more difficult.

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The latter problem was solved in US-5,378,346 by replacing the cyanide ions with alkali tartrates as complexing agents. However, the problems caused by the use of tin(IV) ions are not solved.

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According to EP 0 663 460, an electroplating bath is known which permits the deposition of tin from the stage of the divalent tin so that the necessary energy input may be reduced. The dependence of the rate and composition of the tin-zinc deposition on the current density was also decreased. However, the amphoteric surfactants proposed in this reference lead to a situation where bath management

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remains critical and must be adjusted and supervised with great accuracy in order to prevent dark and faulty depositions.

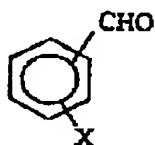
It was therefore the object of the present invention to provide an electroplating bath solution for depositing tin-zinc alloys which does not contain cyanide, permits reduced energy consumption during deposition because tin is deposited from a solution containing tin(II) ions, and the bath management of which is not critical over a wide range of freely selectable parameters and permits depositions free of faults and discolouration.

The above object is achieved by an aqueous solution which, in addition to tin(II) and zinc(II) ions, contains aliphatic carboxylic acids and/or alkali salts thereof as complexing agents as well as a mixture of anionic and non-ionic surfactants as grain refining agents.

In an advantageous embodiment, the aqueous solution of the invention also contains aromatic aldehydes and/or aromatic ketones as brighteners. Preferably, aldehydes or ketones, respectively, of the following formulae (I) and (II), respectively are used:



wherein AR = phenyl, naphthyl; R = CH<sub>2</sub>, CH = CH and R' = H, C<sub>1-3</sub> alkyl.



(II)

wherein X = H, CH<sub>3</sub>, OCH<sub>3</sub>, Cl, Br.

A special advantageous compound of the formula (II) is o-Cl-benzaldehyde.

The pH value of the solution is preferably 2 – 8, especially preferably 3 – 5.

The tin(II) and zinc(II) ions are preferably used in the form of chlorides, sulfates or alkyl sulfonates.

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Optionally, one or more conducting salts of the respective anions are additionally used.  $\text{NH}_4\text{Cl}$  and/or  $\text{NH}_4(\text{CH}_3\text{SO}_3)$  are preferred.

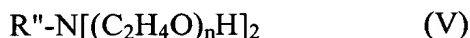
Preferred aliphatic carboxylic acids in the aqueous solution according to the invention are hydrocarboxylic acids and amino carboxylic acids; citric acids and alkali salts thereof are especially preferred.

The non-ionic surfactants of the present invention preferably have the formula (III)



wherein R = alkyl, aryl, alkylaryl and  $n = 1 - 100$ . Most preferably  $n$  is 6 - 15 and a total of carbon atoms in the aryl radical is 8 - 20.

In addition to these non-ionic surfactants, thioethers or amines of the formulae (IV) and (V) may be used as non-ionic surfactants.



wherein  $\text{R}' = \text{C}_{1-3}$  alkyl or  $-(\text{C}_2\text{H}_4\text{O)}_n\text{H}$  and  $\text{R}'' = \text{C}_{5-20}$  alkyl and  $n = 1 - 100$ , especially preferably  $n = 6 - 15$ . Especially preferred are  $\text{H}(\text{C}_2\text{H}_4\text{O)}_n\text{-S-}$   $\text{H}(\text{C}_2\text{H}_4\text{O)}_n\text{H}$  with  $n = 8$  to 12 and  $\text{C}_{12}\text{H}_{25}\text{-N}[(\text{C}_2\text{H}_4\text{O)}_n\text{H}]_2$  with  $n = 15 - 25$ .

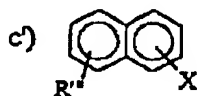
Aliphatic or aromatic sulfonates are preferably used as anionic surfactants. In a preferred embodiment, one or more compounds of the formulae (VI) to (IX) are selected:



wherein  $\text{R} = \text{C}_{3-12}$  alkyl;  $\text{X} = \text{H}, -\text{SO}_3\text{M}$ ;  $\text{M} = \text{Na}, \text{K}, \text{NH}_4$



wherein  $\text{R}' = \text{C}_{3-12}$  alkyl;  $\text{R}'' = \text{C}_{2-5}$  alkyl,  $\text{M} = \text{Na}, \text{K}, \text{NH}_4$



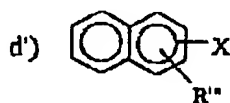
(VIII)

wherein  $R''' = H, C_{1-5} \text{ alkyl}, O-(C_2H_4O)_n-X$ ; or



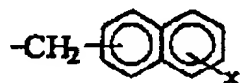
and  $X = SO_3M$  with  $M = Na, K, NH_4$

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(IX)

wherein  $R''' = H, C_{1-5} \text{ alkyl}, O-(C_2H_4O)_n-X$ ; or

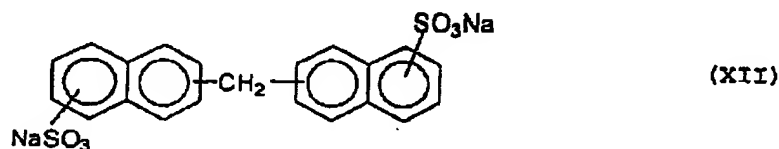
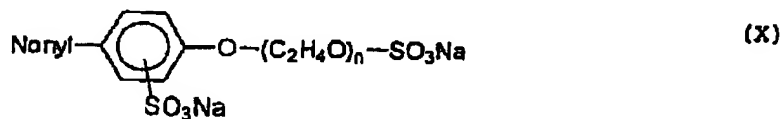


and  $X = SO_3M$  with  $M = Na, K, NH_4$

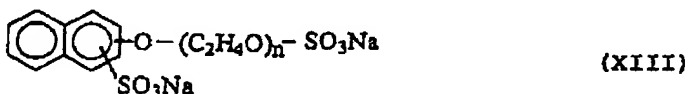
10 with  $n = 8 - 14$ .

A particularly preferred selection from the above series are the anionic surfactants according to the following formulae (X) to (XIII)

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and



wherein  $n = 8 - 14$ .

Optionally, the electroplating bath for depositing zinc-tin alloys may also contain aromatic and/or heterocyclic carboxylic acids or alkali salts thereof of the formula (XIV)



Preferred embodiments of these carboxylic acids are nicotinic acid and/or Na benzoate.

The concentrations of the individual components are advantageously selected within the following ranges:

zinc(II) ions	5 g/l to 50 g/l
especially preferred	20 g/l to 25 g/l

- tin(II) ions 0.5 g/l to 5 g/l  
 especially preferred 1 g/l to 3 g/l  
 aliphatic carboxylic acids 30 g/l to 200 g/l  
 especially preferred 60 g/l to 140 g/l
- 5 non-ionic surfactants  
 - according to formula (III) 0 g/l to 10 g/l  
 especially preferred 0 g/l to 2 g/l  
 - according to formula (IV) or (V) 0 g/l to 10 g/l  
 especially preferred 0 g/l to 2 g/l
- 10 anionic surfactants 5 g/l to 30 g/l  
 especially preferred 10 g/l to 15 g/l  
 aromatic aldehydes and/or aromatic ketones 0 g/l to 0,5 g/l  
 especially preferred 0 g/l to 0,2 g/l  
 aromatic and/or heterocyclic
- 15 carboxylic acids or alkali salts thereof 0,5 g/l to 10 g/l  
 especially preferred 1 g/l to 3 g/l  
 conducting salts 10 g/l to 150 g/l  
 especially preferred 30 g/l to 70 g/l
- 20 The present invention also comprises the use of the aqueous solutions described above for depositing tin-zinc coatings, especially tin-zinc coatings having a zinc content of 10 to 50 wt.-%.

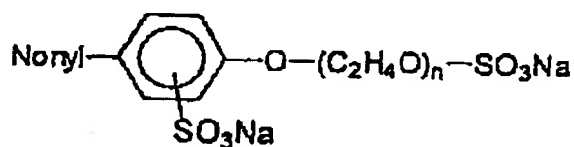
The invention is illustrated by the following example.

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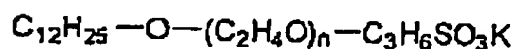
An aqueous solution was prepared from the following components:

Citric acid	100 g/l
NH <sub>4</sub> Cl	50 g/l
NH <sub>4</sub> OH, 25 %	90 g/l
H <sub>3</sub> BO <sub>3</sub>	30 g/l
Sn <sup>2+</sup> as Sn(CH <sub>3</sub> SO <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub>	3 g/l
ZnCl <sub>2</sub>	33 g/l

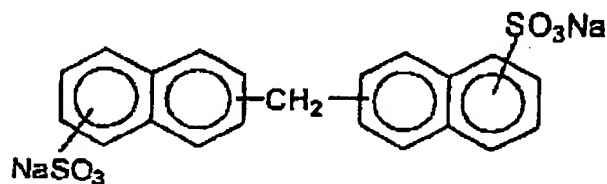
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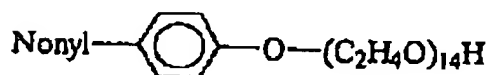
4 g/l



5 g/l



3 g/l



2 g/l

Na benzoate

2 g/l

Nicotinic acid

0,1 g/l

o-Cl benzaldehyde

0,05 g/l

With this solution, a tin-zinc alloy comprising 30 % of zinc was deposited on a substrate surface having a thickness of 10  $\mu\text{m}$  in a light-grey colour under the following conditions:

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$$I = 1 \text{ A/dm}^2$$

$$t = 20 \text{ min}$$

$$T = 40^\circ\text{C}$$

- 10 The above result shows that, with the aqueous solution according to the invention, tin-zinc alloys of a uniform thickness and composition and in a uniform light colour may be deposited without the use of cyanide ions and at a low energy consumption.